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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BUCHAREST 001348

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [RO](#)

SUBJECT: DAMAGED EGOS, DIVIDED PARTIES -- FISSURES IN ROMANIA'S OPPOSITION

REF: A. A) BUCHAREST 1245

[1](#)B. B) BUCHAREST 1003

Classified By: POLITICAL SECTION CHIEF ROBERT GILCHRIST FOR REASONS 1.4
B AND D

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Six months after national elections, Romania,s parliamentary opposition has been shaken by public squabbling and some political defections that may precipitate more fundamental changes. Ex-President Ion Iliescu has threatened to resign from the former ruling Social Democratic Party (PSD), potentially taking with him key PSD stalwarts and the strong electoral support he still enjoys among some voting groups. Separately, Corneliu Vadim Tudor has formally returned to the helm of the extreme nationalist Greater Romania Party (PRM), provoking a schism within that movement. The beneficiary is the center right Liberal-Democratic alliance-led government, which will likely receive support from newly independent MPs. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Several developments among Romania,s opposition parties in recent weeks have produced some realignments in the parliament, with potentially more change. The primary motivator thus far has been the damaged egos of former President and PSD founder Ion Iliescu; and, Greater Romania Party (PRM) leader and founder Corneliu Vadim Tudor. The opposition Liberal-Democratic alliance has remained largely mute on the sidelines, benefiting from the opposition,s internal squabbles and even increasing its support in the parliament though &political migration.8

HELL HATH NO FURY LIKE ILIESCU SCORNED

[1](#)3. (SBU) Immediately after his failure to win the PSD presidency at the April 21 party congress, many political insiders predicted that Iliescu would never graciously accept second class status within the party he had founded (Ref A). The defeat initially came as a personal shock to him -- in fact, he was hospitalized for several weeks due to heart problems precipitated by stress. Shortly after his release and following the advice of some of his closest advisors, he announced on June 3 that he was &seriously considering8 quitting the party. He asserted that he was disgusted by &corruption8 within the PSD, claiming that his loss to ex-FM Mircea Geoana in his bid for the party,s presidency was the result of behind-the-scenes maneuvering. He also stated that his presence in the party might block &new forces8 (Geoana and his team) from &moving forward with their agenda.8

[1](#)4. (SBU) A few weeks before, Ioan Talpes, PSD senator and Iliescu,s former security counselor, resigned from the party, accusing the current leadership of &treating Iliescu unfairly.8 The same day, Talpes met with Romanian President Traian Basescu at the presidential palace. Many political insiders speculate that Talpes provided information to Basescu on corruption within the PSD, including that related to jailed Syrian-Romanian businessman Omar Hayssam - now credibly implicated in the kidnapping of 3 Romanian journalists in Iraq. Four other less-prominent MPs and a number of local leaders also resigned from the PSD as an expression of their disagreement with the party,s new &leadership policies8 and in support of Iliescu. Some in the media predicted the emergence of a new political party surrounding Iliescu that would divide Romania,s left.

[1](#)4. (SBU) The new leadership of the PSD, however, quickly rallied to smooth feelings and prevent what they feared could be a meltdown within the party. Although to many, Iliescu represents a remnant of Romania,s communist past, local political analysts point out that he still commands a loyal following, especially among rural, older, and less-educated voters. He can also count on the support of numerous local leaders. PSD Executive President and ex-PM Adrian Nastase admitted June 5 that Iliescu,s departure from the PSD would &greatly damage8 the party. He urged Iliescu to remain within the fold and accept the party,s decision to elect Geoana as president.

[1](#)5. (C) On June 6, a delegation of PSD elder statesmen called on Iliescu and urged him to remain in the PSD, for the sake of the party,s unity. Following that meeting, Iliescu backed

off from his earlier remarks, promising in a joint press conference with Geoana that he would remain as head of the PSD Senators in Parliament until September. Analysts viewed the joint appearance, especially given Iliescu's recent criticisms of Geoana as an opportunist, as a sign of restored party unity - at least for now. Nonetheless, many analysts continue to opine that it is only a matter of time before Iliescu leaves the PSD. Much also depends on the impact of a recent announcement of criminal charges against Iliescu for inciting miners, riots in the early 1990s (septel). Although it is the common belief among many Romanians that Iliescu was behind the deadly riots, a drawn out debate over his role could further erode his popular support.

TUDOR RETURNS TO PRM'S HELM (HE NEVER REALLY LEFT)

16. (SBU) As PSD's troubles simmered, those within the extreme nationalist Greater Romanian Party (PRM) came to a full boil. The party's core membership June 4 voted to restore the movement's founder Corneliu Vadim Tudor as the party's president. The decision followed days of publicized infighting culminating in the PRM Standing Bureau's June 2 decision to expel from the party former president Corneliu Ciontu and PRM vice-president Anghel Stanciu. The Convention accused both men, handpicked by Tudor in March to lead the party when he stepped down as the party's titular leader, of plotting against Tudor.

17. (C) The June 4 convention also voted to drop the word &popular from the party's name) effectively ending the PRM's bid to affiliate itself with the center-right European Popular Party (EPP)(Ref B). The PRM's decision to return to its original name followed the decision of a delegation of the European Popular Party (EPP), which visited Bucharest June 2-3, not to open negotiations with PRM. According to independent Embassy contacts, Ciontu had attempted to present a credible application to the EPP, but Tudor sabotaged his efforts from behind the scenes, remaining the party's de facto, if not de jure, leader. PRM leaders have also observed that the party's core electorate (mostly aging, rural, and nationalist) was confused by Tudor's replacement in March by the little known Ciontu and Tudor's superficial attempts to transform the PRM into a mainstream center-right party. For most Romanians, including the PRM's supporters, Tudor and the PRM are one in the same, with the party inextricably linked to Tudor's ultranationalist message. Party insiders loyal to Tudor were also vexed that Ciontu's temporary accession to the party's presidency meant that their influence within the party had diminished.

18. (SBU) Erstwhile PRM president Ciontu subsequently declared that he and six other PRM Chamber deputies plus five independent deputies (who resigned from the PRM group of deputies in February) will form a separate parliamentary group with the goal of establishing a &modern Christian-Democratic party.8 In a June 2 interview, Ciontu excluded any compromise with Tudor and said that his PRM colleagues had to choose between &nationalism and euro-popular identity,8 between &isolation and responsible government.8 Two regional PRM branches have already publicly vowed to join Ciontu's movement. Ex-PRM member and Iasi vice-mayor Constantin Neculau echoed their sentiments when he stated that Vadim's comeback and Ciontu's expulsion make it impossible for the PRM to enter the political mainstream, either within Romania or as part of the EPP. Indeed, recent polls show the PRM's level of popular support as steadily declining, with one sounding showing only seven percent of voters supporting the PRM (which gained 13 percent in fall's parliamentary elections).

19. (U) The two major parties of the center-right governing coalition, the National Liberal Party (PNL) and the Democratic Party (PD), have been the main beneficiaries of the PSD's and PRM's internal struggles. Four of the PSD and PRM defectors have already joined one of the governing parties and those who have remained independent have voted, so far, with the center-right coalition. In February three PD deputies left the party after a falling out between former PD senior leader and deputy Cosmin Gusa and President Basescu. Gusa and two other deputies now call their small bloc in the Chamber the National Initiative Party (PIN).

WHAT THE PARLIAMENT LOOKS LIKE NOW

10. (SBU) The net effect of changes in the Parliament thus far appears to be a better standing for the PNL-PD led coalition. Embassy contacts within the Parliament tell us the new bloc of renegade PRM members led by Ciontu plans to support the governing coalition, in an attempt to appear like a mainstream Christian Democratic movement. The governing coalition will still be challenged in the Senate, where its majority remains relatively slim and few changes have occurred.

11. (U) The composition of the Parliament, compared to December 2004, is as follows:

CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES (seats)		
	Dec. 2004	June 2005
PNL*	64	66
PD*	48	45
PSD	113	111
PC*	19	20
PRM	48	34
UDMR*	22	22
Minorities*	18	18
Independent	0	1
Ex-PRM(Ciontu Group)	0	12
PIN (Gusa Group)	0	3
Total	332	332

*Ruling coalition

SENATE (seats)		
	Dec. 2004	June 2005
PNL*	29	30
PD*	20	20
PSD	46	44
PC*	11	11
PRM	21	20
UDMR*	10	10
Minorities*	-	
Independents	-	2
Total	137	137

*Ruling coalition

12. (SBU) Comment: Romania's proportional &party list8 system in place since 1990 has historically been characterized by party splintering and changes in party affiliation in periods following national elections. From 2000-2004, such fluctuation benefited the then ruling PSD, which greatly increased its ranks at both the national and local level. The current trend appears to be moving towards the center-right. Bucharest analysts are split as to what a departure of Iliescu from PSD would mean for the party. Some say it would be a serious blow, splitting the socialist left. Others say it would present an opportunity for Geoana and others to refit the party with a modern Social Democratic image. The extreme nationalist and xenophobic PRM faces greater challenges, with some pundits asserting the movement may be diminishing in both influence and ultimately popular support. Until the 2000 elections, the PRM typically counted on roughly 7-8 percent of the vote. Recent polling suggests the party may be returning to that level after winning an historically high 26 percent of parliamentary seats in the 2000 election. We anticipate further defections from the PRM in the parliament toward the political mainstream. End Summary.

13. (U) Amembassy Bucharest,s reporting telegrams are available on the Bucharest SIPRNET Website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/bucharest .
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